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THE OFFICE OF MAYOR

JOHN PURROY MITCHEL

Mayor of the City of New York

TO discuss adequately and fully the duties of the mayoralty and the functions and duties of the board of estimate, would be to cover the entire scope and field of municipal government, because the mayor and the board of estimate, taken together, touch the government of the city at every point. I shall try first to outline for you the duties and functions of the mayor, and in general terms the work of the board of estimate, and then to point out—or possibly to point out as I go along—some of the major problems that present themselves to the mayor in the discharge of his duties either as mayor or as chairman of the board of estimate and apportionment.

The first thing that the mayor has to do when he assumes office is to appoint the heads of his administrative departments. There are, if I recollect aright, some twenty-nine departments under the jurisdiction of the mayor, of which he appoints the administrative heads. I could not enumerate them all for you. You probably know them—the police department, the fire department, the departments of water supply, health, correction, tenements, and parks, the corporation counsel, the city chamberlain, and a number of others. The most important thing to the success of any mayor's administration is the selection of competent, qualified, trained men for the administration of these great departments.

In the days when the government of the city was dominated by political machines the plan and theory were to select these heads of departments for political service rendered. Their appointments were recommended to the mayor by the leader—we call him usually the "boss"—of the reigning political party; and the mayor in a great many instances—I might say, as a rule—appointed to the administration of these departments the men presented to him by the political party responsible for his election. That was one theory of government, and at times it worked out to a degree, for often the men who have demonstrated particular

capacity in political life are qualified for the discharge of administrative duties, but in a great many instances it did not work out, and we had in office men who had made successes as district leaders, but who were wholly unfit to discharge the duties of public office and who were without the necessary qualification of common honesty for the discharge of those duties.

The theory of selection upon which the fusion of a year and a half ago, like the fusion which elected Mayor Low some years ago to office, was predicated, was that appointments to the headship of these departments should be based solely upon qualification, training and fitness to discharge the duties of the office, and without regard to political service rendered. That was the duty that first presented itself to me on assuming the office of mayor. There had been a number of political parties contributory to the fusion movement. Each of these parties felt that, subject, of course, to the prime requirement of competency and efficiency, it ought to receive recognition in these appointments. My point of view toward the selection of the heads of departments was that, first of all, I had to find men qualified; that if qualified and trained men could be found within the lines of these political parties contributory to the fusion, I should be glad to find them, to select them, and to appoint them. But if I could not find them within the lines of those parties within a reasonable length of time, or if I could find better qualified men outside the organizations of these parties, I felt that it was my duty to select those men.

On that basis the heads of the present city departments were selected and appointed. Some few of them are what might be called organization party men; but they were selected not for that reason, but because in the field of either public administration or private business they had demonstrated their capacity and proved their competency. A great many of the others are not what could be called organization party men. Conspicuously I think I might point to the commissioner of the department of correction, who neither is a man, nor is she actively allied with any particular party organization, so far as I know. And yet Miss Davis, the first woman commissioner appointed in the city of New York, has conspicuously made good, and demonstrated that as an administrator and a maker of departmental policy she is quite the equal of

any other commissioner, and the superior of any who has held the office which she now holds.

It may seem a simple undertaking to make selections upon that basis, but I assure you that it is no such thing. The pressure, the perfectly natural pressure, that comes from each one of the parties is great. You are urged that this particular applicant recommended by the party is quite as good as any other you may find elsewhere. He may, in fact, have some excellent qualifications. Perhaps the balance is almost even between him and the other man; and yet that other man may have some particular qualification, or some particular experience, that recommends him more strongly; and when the selection is made, then the party that recommended the other feels aggrieved, because it says, "After all, he was pretty nearly as good."

Furthermore, it is by no means an easy thing to persuade the men who are best qualified by training to accept appointment under the city government. The field of private enterprise offers far better financial returns than does the field of city government; and to men who have conspicuously made good in private business or in public office are offered opportunities in the private field that cannot be matched in the public service; and it is therefore at times difficult to entice these men into the public service; and it is only a sense of public duty and the realization of the opportunity for real service that has led into the city government some of the men who are now holding office as commissioners. I might point to the instance of Dr. Goldwater, the commissioner of health. Dr. Goldwater in the field of his private work was earning a return for himself more than three times his salary as commissioner of health. I offered him the opportunity of giving up that income and devoting his entire time to the administration of the department of health, and the only consideration that I had to offer him for that sacrifice was the conspicuous opportunity for a public service. He accepted the office, he has rendered that service and he has demonstrated how an efficient health department can be run. I am afraid that we shall not be able to hold him much longer. I do not blame him for feeling that he must return to the field of private work. You cannot expect a man to sacrifice his own interests forever. He has organized that department;

he leaves it when he goes—and I hope he will not go for some time to come—he leaves it an efficient machine. He has laid down policies that will not be departed from under this administration, and that I believe will not be departed from under any future administration, so long as the people remain vigilant. But his case demonstrates the difficulty which we experience when we try to bring thoroughly competent and trained men into the public service and then to hold them.

The next most important thing, probably equally important, which the mayor is called upon to do, is to take his place as chairman of the board of estimate and apportionment, and participate in the work of that board. The board of estimate is the body of financial control of the city government, constituted as you know: the mayor, the comptroller, and the president of the board of aldermen, with three votes each; the borough presidents of Manhattan and Brooklyn, with two votes each; and the borough presidents of The Bronx, Queens and Richmond, with one vote each. This board appropriates all of the money devoted to the conduct of the business of the city government and apportions that money between departments, bureaus and subdivisions of the government. It authorizes the institution of all our great public works. It sets up the financial control which is administered partly by the comptroller and partly by the bureaus that the board of estimate has created for the conduct of its own business. It in very large measure makes the policy of the city of New York. By that I mean that it determines such broad questions as the construction of our rapid transit system, and the terms and conditions upon which that system should be constructed and operated. It determines the plan upon which our port is to be developed. It authorizes the institution of the various portions of that plan. It determines the financial policy of the city, as it did recently when by resolution it declared the institution of a new plan for financing permanent public improvements of a non-revenue-producing class, and said that improvements of that kind should hereafter be financed in increasing proportions out of the tax budget of the city of New York, instead of through the issue of fifty-year bonds. All these duties that board performs, and I can assure you that it is about as busy a deliberative body as sits

anywhere in this country or elsewhere. It meets once a week, and its calendar usually numbers upward of 200 separate items. In a great many instances, public debate is had on the items of that calendar. In every single instance some investigation has been made by some agency, either of the board of estimate or of one of the members of that board. For the purpose of making these investigations and bringing to the board the facts on which intelligent judgment can be predicated, the board has established an organization. It has its chief engineer with his staff to pass upon public improvements. It has its bureau of franchises with the chief of that bureau and his staff to pass upon all franchise applications and the terms upon which they may be granted by the board of estimate. It has its secretary and his staff of clerks for the discharge of purely secretarial and clerical duties. This year that board established two new bureaus. The first is the bureau of contract supervision, to which are referred all plans for work to be done by contract, and that bureau reports back to the board of estimate upon every such proposed undertaking before it is authorized by the board of estimate. Frequently on the report of that bureau the board of estimate determines to cut down the amount of expenditure proposed for such undertaking, and finds that it can get the work done for a good deal less money than was at first supposed. Then there is the bureau of standardization. That bureau prepares and presents to the board of estimate for adoption standard specifications for supplies and for work to be done. It considers and reports to the committee on salaries of the board of estimate upon all applications either for the increase of salary, for the establishment of a salary grade or a new salary grade, or for the increase in the number of employes in any particular department. You can see that through the agency of those bureaus the board of estimate maintains currently a close financial control over the operations of all of the departments, those under the jurisdiction of the mayor and those under the jurisdiction of the borough presidents and others as well.

In addition to that organization the board of estimate has created under this administration a series of standing committees to determine questions of policy and the preparation of great constructive plans. For example, it has the committee on public

education, to which are referred all new plans for financing new departures in the educational program of the city. That committee also considers the budget of the board of education when it comes time to make the budget. The board of estimate also has its committee on port and terminal development. To that committee are referred all plans for the development of any of the facilities of the port. For instance, the committee laid down the plan which is now before the board of estimate for the construction of a marginal terminal railway in South Brooklyn, over several miles of the waterfront of that borough, at a proposed cost of approximately \$12,000,000, a great enterprise to serve the commerce and industries of this city, which, if it be completed under the bill that the legislature has recently enacted and that we hope the governor will shortly sign, will mean the addition of about \$100,000,000 of taxable values to the borough of Brooklyn and of countless millions to the commerce of the port of New York. To that committee is committed the preparation of plans for the re-casting of the terminal facilities upon the west side of Manhattan Island, plans for getting the New York Central Railroad tracks off the streets of the city of New York, putting them under ground or above ground, as the case may warrant, and getting them under cover either by tunnel or otherwise where they now pass through the parks of the city.

We have a number of other committees in the board of estimate; as for example, the committee on social welfare; the city plan committee, to lay down all plans for the development of the street system and the park system of the city; and a number of others. But these which I have named to you are the principal committees. I should also tell you that we have a budget committee; one committee on the tax budget and another on the corporate stock budget, although their membership is the same. These are the committees which, through the agency of the bureaus and investigative bodies, maintained either in the board of estimate or in the office of the commissioner of accounts or in the comptroller's office, investigate the various applications of the departments for appropriations each year and make up the tax budget of the city. There is no more important work than that, because on the making of that budget depends the tax rate of the city, depends the

question whether or not departments are going to be permitted to expend more money than they need, depend the plans for the development of the service of the departments. That committee, acting for the board of estimate, determines in very large measure the policies governing the development of administration within all the departments of the city government

In addition to membership upon that board, the mayor sits as chairman of the sinking fund commission. That commission, or the members of that commission, act as trustees of all of the sinking funds of the city of New York. It also has jurisdiction over the making of leaseholds, and it determines the rate of interest which the city of New York will pay upon a bond issue which it is about to advertise for bids. The mayor also sits as chairman of the banking commission, the body which has jurisdiction over the matter of the designation of the depositories of city funds. He also sits as chairman of the armory board, which has control and jurisdiction over all the armories of the city; appropriates, subject to review by the sinking fund commission, the funds for the construction of armories; and has care of their maintenance and control. He also sits as chairman of the board of city record, which handles through its regularly appointed agent all of the public printing and advertising.

For all of that work in the control of his administrative departments, as members of these various boards and commissions, the mayor has an exceedingly limited personal staff. He has his secretary, his executive secretary, his assistant secretary, and a few clerks and stenographers. Beyond that he has no personal staff. The direct business of the office is to-day divided between the secretary and the executive secretary. The assistant secretary has been assigned to a supervision of the work of these various boards and commissions on which the mayor sits, and he is the only assistant to-day whom the mayor has available for specialization upon the work of these boards and commissions. For the rest of his contact he must rely upon the work either of these bureaus established by the board of estimate, upon the comptroller, or upon the office of the commissioner of accounts, which, of course, is under the jurisdiction of the mayor, but is organized primarily for other purposes.

I have already tried to outline to you in a very brief and rough manner the matter of budget making. There are a number of agencies that contribute to that work. The departments first submit their estimates. The plan prior to the beginning of this administration was for each department to submit its estimate to the board of estimate in just as large a sum as it dared ask for, and then the board of estimate took that request and through the comptroller's office investigated it and then cut it down to just as low a sum as it dared appropriate. The board of estimate was largely without accurate information upon which to predicate the cut that it might make. The department itself was largely without accurate information upon which to predicate its request. We have established these two new bureaus for investigation. During the administration of Mayor Gaynor we established the budget committees, which have been continued under this administration. But one thing was undertaken last year which never was undertaken before.

Each department head was instructed to make a request based not on the idea of inflation, but on the actual necessities of the department and reduced to the minimum which he believed to be consistent with those needs. He was instructed to submit it to the mayor and not to the board of estimate until it had been passed and reviewed by the mayor. Each department head did submit his request to me. I went over those requests, acting through the commissioner of accounts and through the city chamberlain, who personally represented me; and when he had reviewed the requests and they had been recast in the light of our examination, they were sent forward to the board of estimate over my signature in the form of an executive budget, which had never been attempted before, and that executive budget, for the first time in the history of the city, represented a decrease in its total request from the actual appropriation of the year before. When the budget went into the hands of the board of estimate it came under the scrutiny of these bureaus. It was again scrutinized by the commissioner of accounts and by the chamberlain, now sitting as a member of the sub-committee on budget appointed by the budget committee of the board of estimate. And as a result of all that work and re-scrutiny these appropriations when made, taken together with

the appropriations of the offices of the five borough presidents, represented a net reduction of \$2,000,000 under the actual appropriations for the year previous.

That represents, to my mind, intelligent and scientific budget making, as far as we have been able to develop it up to date. The budget of next year will be made in the same way, after the same kind of careful scrutiny; and I want to emphasize this fact, that effective and scientific budget making means not merely scrutiny of the requests of the departments by the board of estimate, analysis of the requests by the agencies of the board of estimate, and control exercised there, but it must also mean a painstaking continuous effort on the part of the departments and their administrative heads themselves to predicate requests upon actual needs, after those needs have been ascertained by careful and scientific analysis in the departments, made by the heads of the departments themselves; and in no other way will a scientific budget be made or will this city be able to keep its budget down to the actual requirements of the departments.

Through his membership in the board of estimate, and through his membership on the constructive and most important committees of that board, the mayor contributes to the making of city policy. He must also contribute to that individually as head of the city government. There are a great many problems which are handled both within the board of estimate and independently of the board of estimate, upon which the mayor must exercise a certain leadership in community thought. For example, we are facing to-day an acute and serious problem in the matter of taxation. The budget of New York, by reason of causes over which no member of the present board of estimate and apportionment has control, by reason of inherited conditions, due in a very large degree to mandatory legislation which has come to this city from Albany without the request of its own officials, the budget, we find, is going constantly up to higher and higher figures, without the power of the board of estimate or the mayor to keep it down. For instance, the budget of 1915 went up \$6,000,000 over the budget of 1914 in spite of the fact that we reduced the administrative cost of government, that which is under our control, by \$2,000,000; and this was due to the fact

that we had to provide in the budget for four and a half millions more of uncollectible taxes in 1915 than we did in 1914, that we had to provide for approximately \$3,000,000 of increase due to the cost of the \$100,000,000 loan that New York was compelled to negotiate as a result of the war conditions that we faced in common with the rest of the world, when we were compelled to secure that money in order to meet our foreign obligations in gold, and not default the city's obligations; due also to the fact that last winter we had an unprecedented condition of snow followed by falling temperature, so that the street cleaning department was compelled to cart from the city's streets almost every cubic yard of snow that fell in those two great snowstorms. Nature did not aid the street cleaning department last winter as it has done this winter. That cost the city of New York upwards of \$2,000,000. The increase was due, also, to the fact that we had to provide in the budget about \$1,800,000 as the increased cost of the educational work of the city. That increase was occasioned in part by the mandatory increases of teachers' salaries prescribed by law, and in part by the additional teachers that we had to provide for to teach the new and additional pupils that had already come into the system or were naturally to be expected during the year 1915.

These things raised the budget \$6,000,000 despite the cut of \$2,000,000 in administrative cost. Next year the city of New York, through the exercise of economy in administration and through certain reductions which it will be able to effect in uncollectible taxes, and by reason of the fact that there will be no \$100,000,000 loan, we hope, to negotiate next year, would be able to keep its budget constant and its tax rate constant, were it not for the fact that next year we face, as far as we are able to see to-day, a direct state tax, in addition to our own budgetary requirements. New York pays 70% of any direct state tax, and so we must look forward to an increase in our budget due to that direct state tax if it comes. In the year that follows, because of the new financial policy of carrying in the budget non-income-producing public improvements, we must expect still greater increases. Therefore, this problem of taxation becomes a real and pressing problem. There are three courses that are open as I see it, and we must

follow one of them. We must either lay additional taxes upon real estate—and that is highly undesirable, because real estate is already burdened about to its limit, or we must reduce the amount or the character of service that the city renders to its people. We must cut out police protection, health protection, education service, or some one of the great services that the city renders. Or, as a third possibility, we must develop some new sources of municipal revenue; and that can be done only by devising some new and additional system of taxation. So I say that that problem of taxation, which from time immemorial has been the most difficult problem of government, is here with us to-day and must be solved by the present city administration. In the solution of that problem the mayor must take upon himself the burden of leadership. Now, no system of taxation is going to be popular with the people who are to be taxed. No plan for the cutting of broad services is going to be popular; perhaps it will be even less so than a new plan of taxation; the results flowing from the cut of service in health protection or in education or in police protection might be far more serious to the city and its people than the development of new sources of income through taxation. But there is a problem which must be solved by the mayor and the board of estimate, and it requires about as much time as one individual has to give even when he gets the fullest help and support that intelligent citizen committees and an intelligent board of estimate can give.

I have already outlined the difficult question of financial policy which we solved last September when we declared that these permanent improvements shall hereafter be carried in increasing proportion in the budget until they are entirely so carried. That problem had to be solved on a few days' notice. Although it had been long under consideration, the board of estimate did not come to the point of actually dealing with it until it was precipitated by the negotiation of the \$100,000,000 loan, and then we felt the time had come to take a stand, and we declared for this new policy, a policy which puts New York city for the first time in its history upon the sound financial basis of "pay-as-you-go"—a basis upon which every private enterprise must rest if it does not wish to go ultimately into the hands of the receiver or the

bankruptcy courts. New York stands upon that basis now, but in order to get there and to stay there during the next few years, it is going to be necessary to lay a temporarily increased burden through the budget upon the tax-paying community as the price of putting the city upon that sound financial basis. That was a difficult problem. It had to be solved last September. This board of estimate faced it frankly and solved it in that way, and I believe that the taxpayers of a few years hence will have ample cause to thank the present city government for solving the question as it has done, when the interest payments included in the budget have been reduced to a point more than enough to balance the increase which we have to carry on account of these permanent improvements.

I had intended to talk to you at some length about the functions of the mayor in dealing with legislation that comes either from the legislature at Albany or from the local legislature, the board of aldermen. With regard to the former he has a suspensory veto of a local bill; that is to say, he may veto it and it stands disapproved, unless the legislature repasses it over the mayor's veto, which it may do by a majority vote. That has been a most necessary safeguard to the city. Every year we get vicious and interfering bills which the mayor of the city must veto in the interest either of the taxpayers or of the development of the community. It looks as if we were going to get such a bill in a few days. The senate of the state this afternoon passed the so-called Lockwood-Ellenbogen bill, which provides for the disruption of the tenement house department, the department of water supply, the fire department, the health department, and the license department, by taking from all of them jurisdiction over the construction of buildings and distributing that jurisdiction among the various offices of the five borough presidents. I shall not go into all the features of that bill which cause me to make the statement I am about to make, but they will be discussed sufficiently in public within the next few days. Suffice it to say that that bill, conceived by the land speculators of this city, has been put forward primarily for the purpose of prostituting the administration of the tenement house law of the city of New York and of breaking down the effective administration of that law and the other laws which

(490)

provide for a proper regulation of building construction in the city of New York. It has behind it, too, political purposes, but they are insignificant in comparison with that primary and vicious purpose of breaking down the administration of those necessary regulative laws. The bill will come to me if it passes the assembly. There is still, perhaps, the chance that it will not pass that house of the legislature. It will come to me if it does pass, and I am required under the law to give a hearing on that bill. I suppose theoretically I should not take a position with regard to it until after that hearing; but I know a vicious piece of legislation when I see it, and I am going to veto that bill if it comes to me. And then it will go back. No doubt the legislature may be asked to pass it over my veto; and whether it does or not will depend very largely on the extent to which the voice of the people of this city interested in the effective administration of these laws makes itself heard in the senate and assembly chambers at Albany. The mayor has a like veto upon ordinances enacted by the board of aldermen, but there they may be over-ridden only by a larger vote. To that extent he has control, qualified control, over legislation both state and city affecting the administration and the conduct of the government of the city of New York.

The mayor has under his control the twenty-nine administrative departments. He appoints their heads. He is responsible for the work that they do. If it be good or bad, he is responsible. The theory of the relation of the mayoralty to these departments in the past has been this: That the mayor should appoint the head of the department and send him out to make good, send him out to administer; if he got into trouble, then try to help him out; if he got into too serious trouble or failed to make good, or did something calling for such action, then remove him and appoint a successor. That theory has been due very largely to the enormous amount of time which the mayor must devote to the other duties of his office, to his participation in the work of these various boards and commissions, to the time that he must devote to interviews in his office. Everybody wants to see the mayor and see him personally. People are not satisfied with seeing secretaries; they must see the mayor; and no matter how trivial the business, whether it is the restoration of a corporation inspector in a depart-

ment who has been dropped for inefficiency, or whether it is the transfer of some minor clerk from one bureau to another, they feel they must see the mayor. He is called upon to keep the door of his office open to the public, and after all it is proper that he should, because the public ought to have direct contact with the mayor; people ought to have access to him, and he must reserve enough time to see the people who come to the office and want to see him. Then he has, if I may call them such, a number of social duties to discharge. He must go out and attend functions and make speeches. They consume a great deal of time and take a good deal of effort; they consume energy. They are frequently disruptive of a business day. But he must discharge these duties.

Then the correspondence of the mayor's office is enormous, and you would be surprised to know how utterly inconsequential and ridiculous some of it is. But it must all be attended to. Whether it be the man who writes from Canada and wants the mayor's office to find a wife for him, or whether it be the wife whose husband has lost employment and who writes for help, all this correspondence must receive attention, and that takes time. It takes the time of a very material proportion of the staff. There are a thousand things that consume time and effort, and there is not enough time left for the mayor to supervise the work of the departments and to be actually as well theoretically responsible for it. Therefore, the theory has prevailed that I have indicated.

Now, it has seemed to me that the mayor ought to be more than merely the head of the city government sitting in the City Hall ready to receive the public, appointing the heads of the departments and sending them out to make good independently, or to fail independently; that he ought to be really the business manager of the city of New York, that he ought to have the close contact that would enable him to become an effective business manager. There are problems of pure administration in the departments that ought to come back to the mayor for settlement. There are problems of policy in the departments that ought to come back to him for settlement. He cannot give the time to them that he should. He needs an agency through which to keep himself in contact with those problems, through which to work co-operatively with the heads of the departments in solving these

problems and in building up constructively better administration and better control. I tried to create that kind of an administrative agency last year. I asked the legislature to make the office of the commissioner of accounts constructive in name and functions as well as investigative. I asked it to make that commission one-headed and to call it the department of administration, to keep the investigative functions, to add the constructive, to give me in short an agency which I could send out into the departments, analyzing their problems, working with their commissioners, building up co-operatively with them, but with the advantage of a detached point of view, a central point of view, the constructive plans of administration in those departments. Working through the office of the commissioner of accounts as it is now, and with the aid of the city chamberlain, we were able to cut down the cost in these departments by \$2,000,000, or by \$1,500,000 in my departments; and we were able at the same time to give a greater measure of service and a better quality of service. If the mayor were equipped with an effective administrative arm, through the reorganization of the office of the commissioner of accounts, which the legislature alone can authorize, he would have that means of maintaining contact with administration and control over it that he does not have to-day. I do not believe that we shall get the fully effective and economical administration of the departments of this city government that we all want, and that the people of New York are entitled to, until the mayor is equipped with that administrative arm through which to accomplish this result.

I do not pretend that this review of the work of the mayor's office is complete. It has been extremely sketchy and rough in its outlines. It gives you no adequate comprehension of the problems that are presented to the mayor or of the work that he has to do; but perhaps it will suggest to you how some of them come up, how broad some of them are, and how complex is the whole organization through which they are attacked. No administration in New York will be successful that does not have continuous citizen support. I illustrated through the Lockwood-Ellenbogen bill how citizen support may be necessary at times. There are a thousand cases in which it is necessary in order that the hands of

public officials may be supported, and that they may be enabled to get the constructive results for which they are working. Citizen support can be developed and can be had only by keeping the citizenship of the city constantly apprized of the workings of the departments and constantly informed as to the facts. We are trying to do that under this administration, but we need the co-operation of the citizens. If we are to get the results, if you want to be well governed, you have got to take a continuous interest in the government of your city.

It may be trite, but it is true, that the people of a city or of a state or of a nation get government just as good or just as bad as they deserve. That means that they get government good in direct proportion to the interest that they take in it. If you take an interest in your city government, if you study the facts, you will find out what we are trying to do, and whether we deserve your support or not. Then if you give us your support continuously from day to day, we shall be able to get for you the results which the people of this city expect and to which they are entitled.